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ABSTRACT

Deregulation in South Carolina schools was designed to give schools flexibility in meeting state and federal guidelines and student achievement goals. A survey of principals and faculty of deregulated schools examined how they perceived themselves as change agents. A questionnaire was sent to each principal and one faculty member in each of the state's 195 deregulated schools. The schools were free from certain regulations on class scheduling and structure, and monitoring and assessment. Responses were received from 50 percent of the principals and 41 percent of the faculty members. The results indicated that 89 percent of principals and 76 percent of faculty perceived themselves as risk takers who act as change agents in their schools. Inadequate funding and the potential impermanence of deregulation were cited as constraints to deregulation. Both groups also believed that change was a personal process as well as an organizational process that required planning and commitment. Also, both groups defined deregulation similarly, including its positive and negative effects. The most important effect of deregulation found was the lack of innovation or creativity reported by respondents. Although the state's stated purpose for deregulation was to encourage flexibility in meeting student needs, the majority of respondents said that deregulation had not resulted in greater flexibility. (Contains 15 references.) (JPT)

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SCHOOL DEREGULATION: A SECOND LOOK AT SOUTH CAROLINA

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SCHOOL DEREGULATION: A SECOND LOOK AT SOUTH CAROLINA

ABSTRACT

School deregulation was designed to allow schools flexibility in meeting state and federal rules and regulations. Such schools were required to demonstrate sustained student academic achievement. Deregulation has been used in South Carolina schools since 1990 as a consequence of the Educational Improvement Act of 1984. The purpose of this research was to examine how the administrators and teachers of deregulated schools perceived themselves as change agents. This was follow-up research to a study conducted in 1991.

A prepared instrument was sent to each principal and one faculty member of each South Carolina deregulated school. Fifty percent of the principals and 41% of the teachers returned a useable survey instrument. Results indicated that both groups, principals and teachers, perceived that they should be change agents in their schools. Both groups also believed that change was a personal process as well as an organizational process that required planning and commitment. Both groups expressed similar definitions for deregulation, including the positive and negative effects of school deregulation.

of Education, 1989). This statute provided exemption from specific aspects of the Defined Minimum Program (DMP), Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP), and the state-funded Compensatory and Remedial Education regulations (Flanigan & Richardson, 1992).

This research examines how administrators and faculty of South Carolina deregulated schools view themselves as agents of change (Murphy, 1982). Advantages and disadvantages of the deregulation program are described, including comparisons between what administrators and faculty believe the effects of deregulation should be and what the effects of deregulation actually are.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Very little research is available concerning deregulation in South Carolina. Flanigan, Richardson, and Lane (1992) reported a research study of deregulated schools in South Carolina. They found that deregulated schools were not the creative, innovative schools that were envisioned with the passage of the Target 2000 legislation. These schools seemed to be continuing along the same paths that got them to deregulation status (Kercıner & Boyd, 1988).

Olson (1990) supports the conclusions of Flanigan, Richardson, and Lane. After years of complaining about mandates and regulations, few schools and administrators seem to be jumping at the chance to do things differently (Swanson, 1989). Waivers and exemptions have allowed but have

not encouraged change (Penning, 1990). In addition, Bowers (1990) stated that deregulation was offered as a reward to those districts that have proved they can produce superior quality education.

Deregulation should promote innovative approaches to education (Flax, 1989). Yet there are few takers because of skepticism about the commitment, lack of additional funding, teacher bargaining agreements, and lack of creativity on the part of the personnel regarding alternatives (Odden, 1985). This leads to the issue of whether the resulting outcome is improved education (Bowers, 1990).

In South Carolina, to obtain deregulation status, a school must meet the following criteria: (1) the school must have twice been a recipient of a school incentive grant; (2) the school must have met annual NCE gain requirements for reading and mathematics compensatory programs; (3) the school must have no recurring accreditation deficiencies; and (4) the school must have shown a school gain index value at or above the stated average (South Carolina State Department of Education, 1991).

Schools granted deregulation status are exempted from Defined Minimum Program (DMP) standards related to class scheduling, class structure, and staffing. Exemptions from the Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) include on-site monitoring visits and record keeping requirements. Also lifted are regulations regarding class scheduling, class structure, and staffing of the State Funded Compensatory and Remedial Education programs (South Carolina State Department of Education, 1991).

The most potentially important effect of deregulation was the lack of innovation or creativity reported by both groups of respondents. The state purpose of deregulation was to encourage flexibility to meet student needs. However, the majority of respondents indicated that such was not the case.

INTRODUCTION

South Carolina schools, like most state schools, are governed by an intense network of rules, regulations, and policies that are handed down from the federal, state, and local levels (Nyberg, 1981; Nasbitt, 1982). These rules and regulations are often perceived to be working to the detriment of effective schooling in some locations. For years educators have complained about having so many mandates "from above" (Alexander & Kean, 1986). Proponents of deregulation suggest that a re-evaluation of these rules and regulations should take place, especially if they stifle creativity and the effectiveness of the teacher, administrator, and school (Bowers, 1990).

Deregulation began at the federal level under the Reagan administration (Alexander & Kean, 1986). In 1989 South Carolina Governor Carroll Campbell signed into law "Target 2000--School Reform for the Next Decade" (Strong, 1989). Included in this legislative act was the "Flexibility Through Deregulation Program." The purpose of this "Flexibility Through Deregulation Program" was to stimulate innovation and creativity in South Carolina schools by providing exemptions to schools which had demonstrated sustained academic achievement (South Carolina State Board

METHODOLOGY

A survey instrument was developed to determine the opinions of principals and faculty members who were involved in the deregulation program in South Carolina. A list of deregulated schools was obtained from the South Carolina State Department of Education. Two copies of the survey instrument, along with two self-addressed, stamped envelopes, were mailed to each of the 195 deregulated schools in South Carolina. One survey was to be completed by the principal, and the second copy was to be completed by a teacher or another faculty member in the school. The surveys were returned by mail. As completed surveys were returned, they were divided into the correct group—principal or faculty. The compiled data from each question were converted to percentages for comparison.

RESULTS

PRINCIPAL RESPONSES

Ninety-seven of the 195 principal surveys (50 percent) were returned. Some questions (particularly those of gender, age, and race) were not answered by some of the respondents, however available demographic information is recorded in Table 1.

The largest response (48 percent) came from principals whose schools have been deregulated for three years. Twenty-six percent of the schools have been deregulated for two years, and 26 percent have been deregulated for only one year.

Change

Eighty-nine percent of the principals view themselves as agents of change who are risk-takers. Five percent believe that change is needed, but they feel uncomfortable initiating innovative ideas and programs. Six percent believe that things should basically remain the same. In a collateral question, fifty-eight percent of the principals responded that change makes them feel challenged, and 30 percent responded that change makes them feel excited. The remaining 12 percent described change as making them feel eager, stressed, nervous, or anxious.

Definitions

Sixty-two percent of the responding principals defined deregulation as freedom to alter the curriculum by developing innovative programs to meet the needs of the students. Twenty-seven percent defined deregulation as flexible scheduling due to exemption from time constraints. Eight percent defined deregulation as less paperwork and record keeping. The remaining three percent responded that deregulation meant little or nothing to them. Principals ranked the intended effects of deregulation as opposed to the actual effects of deregulation. These data are recorded in Table 2.

Constraints

According to the responding principals, the most significant constraint to flexibility is the lack of additional funding. Sixty percent indicated that the lack of additional funding was the major constraint. Twenty percent believed that lack of creativity on the part of the school personnel was the major constraint. Twenty percent believed that the

major constraint was the hesitancy to change because deregulation may be a "passing fad."

Advantages and disadvantages

Principals offered several suggestions for improvement of the deregulation program in South Carolina. Most suggestions for improvement fit into the following four categories: (1) additional funding should be provided for deregulated schools, and flexibility should be allowed for the spending of these funds; (2) communication between the State Department of Education and the school should be improved through workshops, a hot line, or exemplary projects to assist those schools that are deregulated and those schools who wish to be deregulated; (3) more (or possibly all) constraints should be lifted, particularly local district regulations, special education, and gifted and talented requirements; and (4) the length of time for maintaining deregulation status should be extended, and no loss of status should occur if the school is involved in an innovative program. Other suggestions for improvement included making deregulation compatible with Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation, deregulation of all schools, and testing students every two years.

Forty percent of the principals responded that no flexible program activity had been implemented at their local school. The remaining 60 percent indicated that one or more activities have been implemented. The following activities were described: an integrated curriculum using the whole language approach; added courses, such as fine arts, vocational,

foreign language, and exploratory/enrichment classes; experimental scheduling; and flexible and creative use of personnel.

Eleven principals (12 percent) responded that there were no benefits to deregulation. Other principals listed the following benefits: flexibility of time requirements; freedom to be innovative and change if necessary; less paperwork and record keeping; and a morale booster.

Fifty-five principals (60 percent) indicated that there were no disadvantages of deregulation. Yet the remaining 40 percent of the principals listed the following disadvantages: lack of district support; lack of additional funding; fear of losing status; increased pupil/teacher ratio and loss of personnel; and lack of communication.

FACULTY RESPONSES

The faculty response to the survey was less than the principal response. Eight faculty members (41 percent) of the 195 deregulated schools responded to the survey. These faculty members included 29 assistant principals, 45 teachers, three guidance counselors, two curriculum coordinators, and one media specialist. Demographic information obtained from this group is reported in Table 3. Twenty-six respondents (33 percent) were from schools that have been deregulated for one year. Thirty five percent of the respondents were from schools that have been deregulated for two years, and 32 percent were from schools that have been deregulated for three years.

Change

Seventy-six percent of the faculty members viewed themselves as risk-takers that act as agents of change. Twenty-three percent were uncomfortable initiating innovation and change. Only one teacher responded that things basically needed to remain the same. In a collateral question, fifty-one percent said that change made them feel challenged; and 28 percent described change as making them feel excited. Other responses included eager, anxious, stressed, and nervousness as descriptors of change.

Definitions

To the faculty members, 59 percent of them define deregulation as an opportunity to try other ways of doing things by taking risks and making changes to meet the needs of the students. Thirty percent define deregulation as freedom from constraints placed on schools by the State Department of Education, permitting flexibility in scheduling. Seven percent define deregulation as an honor that has meant little or nothing to the local school. The remaining three percent define deregulation as a wider set of rules that views education in a new light. Table 4 reports how the faculty ranked the intended effects of deregulation as opposed to the actual effects of deregulation.

Constraints

Lack of funding is the major constraint to deregulation according to 61 percent of the faculty members who responded to the survey. Thirty-one percent believe the major constraint is that deregulation may be a "passing

fad." Eight percent view the lack of creativity on the part of the school personnel as the major constraint.

Improvements

Two suggestions for improvement of the deregulation program were submitted by two-thirds of the faculty. Thirty-four percent of the faculty suggested improved communication with input from teachers and the dissemination of ideas. Thirty-two percent indicated that additional funds should be provided for the implementation of innovative programs and additional staff. Other suggestions included: the need for district support in providing release time for planning and providing pertinent in-service; extending the time for maintaining deregulation status so that plans can be made and progress noted; more decision-making at the school level; and reduction of paperwork.

Thirty-six percent of the faculty responded that no flexible program activities have been implemented at their school. Sixty-four percent stated that one or more activities have been implemented at their school. These activities fall into the following categories: (1) an interdisciplinary curriculum using the whole language approach and cooperative learning; (2) addition or extension of classes, i.e., foreign language, enrichment, computer, dance, fine arts, and honors programs; (3) alternative methods of assessment; (4) experimental scheduling; and (5) more planning time for teachers.

Advantages and disadvantages

Twenty-five percent of the faculty cited the major benefit of deregulation as the flexibility and motivation to change and prevalent reason for not implementing innovative programs. This raises a question, "Should additional money for innovative programs be provided by the state to those schools who achieve deregulation status?" These schools have already received incentive award money for their outstanding academic achievements.

The faculty members perceived a lack of communication between the schools and the State Department of Education. Improved communication would benefit the schools, and this could possibly serve to encourage the local school districts to support deregulation. Local school districts must be willing to lift some of their regulations so that staff members of deregulated schools feel that it is "worth it" to have achieved deregulated status.

Twenty-three percent indicated that scheduling is easier due to the flexibility of time and the lifting of the Defined Minimum Program requirements. Eleven percent said that the major benefit was the boosting of the morale. Other benefits included less paperwork and record keeping and the exemption from monitoring by the State Department of Education. Seven percent of the faculty indicated that there were little or no benefits to deregulation.

Sixty-one percent of the faculty said there were no disadvantages to deregulation. Nineteen percent indicated the lack of funding and additional resources as the major disadvantage. Five percent cited the lack of district

support and five percent cited the fear of losing deregulation status. Other disadvantages included the lack of communication, an increase in pupil/teacher ratio, and the resistance to change.

CONCLUSIONS

Many of the flexible programs that were described in this research project could have been implemented in a regulated school. Should creative solutions to educational problems be limited to deregulated schools? Must a school obtain deregulated status before the school becomes empowered to create a learning environment capable of serving the needs of all students? A logical question that should be addressed, is when does the principal feel empowered? At what point does the school reach a stage of mutual support or faculty, staff, administration, and students? This research does not answer the question, rather it poses the questions. The intended purpose of deregulation was to allow flexibility in developing a curriculum that would meet the needs of the students. The expected outcome should be improved student performance. Yet, the net effect of deregulation has been to remove the watchful eye of the State Department of Education.

This research indicates that it is "business as usual" in South Carolina education, despite the deregulation of selected schools. More than two-thirds of the principals and faculty members view themselves as risk-takers that act as agents of change, some even said that change made them feel challenged and excited. However, over one-third of the deregulated schools have not implemented any flexible program activities and meaningful change

is not occurring. The logical conclusion is that the deregulated schools bought into the idea that "regulations got us here so let's keep doing what we've been doing"?

Consequently, the school deregulation program in South Carolina is not living up to its expectations and intentions. Is it possible that South Carolina is going about deregulation in the wrong way, that the wrong schools are being rewarded?

TABLE 1

Demographic data of responding principals of South Carolina deregulated schools

Age	Number of Principals
31–45	3
36–40	18
41–45	19
46–50	21
51–55	18
56–60	12
61–above	3
Gender	
Male	57
Female	37
Race	
Caucasian	73
African American	5
American Indian	1
Years Experience	
0–3 years	16
4–6 years	18
7–9 years	14
10–12 years	9
13–15 years	10
16–18 years	5
more than 18 years	21

TABLE 2

Intended versus actual effects of South Carolina school deregulation as reported by principals of deregulated schools

What the Effects of Deregulation Should Be (Ranked in priority order)
1. Improved student performance
2. Boosted teacher morale
3. Reduced paperwork and record keeping
4. Easier scheduling of classes
5. Exempted from monitoring by the State Department
6. Teachers permitted to teach out of their areas of certification
What the Effects of Deregulation Actually Are (Ranked in priority order)
1. Exemption from monitoring by the State Department
2. Boosted teacher morale
3. Reduced paperwork and record keeping
4. Improved student performance
5. Easier scheduling of classes
6. Teachers permitted to teach out of their areas of certification

TABLE 3

Demographic data of responding faculty of South Carolina deregulated schools

Age	Number of Principals
30–under	7
31–35	9
36–40	20
41–45	25
46–50	15
51–55	3
56–60	1
60–above	0
Gender	
Male	11
Female	69
Race	
Caucasian	75
African American	3
Years Experience	
0–3 years	23
4–6 years	13
7–9 years	9
10–12 years	11
13–15 years	10
16–18 years	4
more than 18 years	10

TABLE 4

Intended versus actual effects of South Carolina school deregulation as reported by faculty of deregulated schools

What the Effects of Deregulation Should Be (Ranked in priority order)

1. Improved student performance
2. Boosted teacher morale
3. Reduced paperwork and record keeping
4. Easier scheduling of classes
5. Exempted from monitoring by the State Department
6. Teachers permitted to teach out of their areas of certification

What the Effects of Deregulation Actually Are (Ranked in priority order)

1. Exemption from monitoring by the State Department
2. Boosted teacher morale
3. Easier scheduling of classes
4. Reduced paperwork and record keeping
5. Improved student performance
6. Teachers permitted to teach out of their areas of certification

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